

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY MONROVIA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5633

INFO AMEMBASSY FREETOWN

AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN

AMEMBASSY DAKAR

C O N F I D E N T I A L MONROVIA 5096

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PINR, LI

SUBJECT: LIBERIAN CABINET RESHUFFLE

REF: MONROVIA 3847

1. THE GOVT. OF LIBERIA JULY 23 ANNOUNCED THE FOLLOWING
CABINET CHANGES:

A. MINISTRY OF DEFENSE: M. BURLEIGH HOLDER, DEPUTY
MINISTER OF STATE FOR PRESIDENTIAL AFFAIRS, REPLACES
HARRY A. GREAVES AS MINISTER; E. HARDING SMYTH, ASSISTANT
MINISTER FOR SPORTS, BECOMES DEPUTY MINISTER FOR OPERATIONS,
A NEWLY-CREATED POSITION AT DEFENSE.

B. EXECUTIVE MANSION: WILFRED E. CLARK, DIRECTOR OF
SPECIAL SECURITY SERVICES AT THE EXECUTIVE MANSION, REPLACES
HOLDER AS DEPUTY MINISTER OF STATE FOR PRESIDENTIAL AFFAIRS
IN CHARGE OF NATIONAL SECURITY. VARNEY E. DEMPSTER, FORMER
DEPUTY OF CLARK, BECOMES DIRECTOR OF SPECIAL SECURITY SERVICE.
RICHARD DIGGS BECOMES DEPUTY MINISTER OF STATE FOR PRESIDENTIAL
AFFAIRS.

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C. OTHER MINISTRIES: MUSICAL CHAIRS IN MINISTRIES OF
HEALTH, LABOR AND POSTAL AFFAIRS, AS FOLLOW: THE MINISTER OF LABOR,
J. JENKINS PEAL, BECOMES MINISTER OF POSTAL AFFAIRS, REPLACING MRS.
ABEODU JONES, WHO BECOMES MINISTER OF HEALTH, REPLACING
ESTRADA BERNARD, WHO BECOMES MINISTER OF LABOR. WILLIS D.
KNUCKLES, FORMERLY ASSISTANT TO VICE PRESIDENT GREENE AND

ONE-TIME PRESIDENT OF THE LIBERIAN FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION, BECOMES ASSISTANT MINISTER OF SPORTS REPLACING SMYTHE.

2. COMMENT:

A. BURLEIGH HOLDER, SON-IN-LAW OF PRESIDENT TOLBERT AND HIS CHIEF ADVISOR AND ACTIN OFFICER ON SECURITY MATTERS, WILL PROVIDE THE PRESIDENT MORE DIRECT CONTROL OVER THE MINISTRY OF DEFENSE. IF HOLDER, A LAW GRADUATE FROM THE U. OF LONDON, CHOOSES TO DO SO, HE HAS THE INFLUENCE AND POWER TO BRING ABOUT THE BASIC IMPROVEMENTS IN THE ARMED FORCES OF LIBERIA WHICH TOLBERT SAYS HE WANTS (REFTEL A). IJOMA FLEMISTER, ACTING DIRECTOR GENERAL OF THE TRUE WHIG PARTY, COMMENTED TO THE POLITICAL COUNSELOR JULY 23 THAT HOLDER IS LIKELY TO BRING MORE DISCIPLINE TO THE ARMED FORCES BUT NOT LIKELY TO MAKE MAJOR PERSONNEL SHIFTS IN THE AFL GENERAL STAFF.

B. E. HARDING SMYTHE, CONSIDERED BY LIBERIANS TO BE THE NATURAL SON OF FORMER PRESIDENT TUBMAN, WAS APPOINTED DIRECTOR OF NATIONAL POLICE IN 1964, RESIGNED IN 1971 WHEN TOLBERT BECAME PRESIDENT, AND BECAME ASSISTANT MINISTER OF SPORTS IN 1973. RECENT NEWSPAPER ACCOUNTS IN THE LOCAL PAPERS HAVE LINKED HIM TO ALLEGED CORRUPT PRACTICES IN THE MINISTRY OF LABOR. EMBASSY FILES CONTAIN REPEATED REFERENCES TO AN EXCESSIVE INTEREST IN ALCOHOL, WHOMEN, AND MONEY. IT IS NOT CONFIDENTIAL

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KNOWN WHAT FUNCTION SMYTHE WILL BE EXPECTED TO FILL IN THE NEWLY-CREATED POST OF DEPUTY MINISTER OF OPERATIONS AT DEFENSE. USMM/L HAD RECOMMENDED ESTABLISHMENT OF SUCH A POSITION TO BE USED BY THE DEFENSE MINISTER TO OBTAIN MORE EXPEDITIOUS IMPLEMENTATION BY THE MILITARY STAFF OF ORDERS ISSUED BY THE MINISTER.

C. CHANGES AT THE EXECUTIVE MANSION MERELY ADVANCE FORMER SUBORDINATES TO POSITIONS VACATED BY THEIR CHIEFS AND HAVE NO SPECIAL SIGNIFICANCE.

D. TWO EXPLANATIONS FOR PEAL'S REMOVAL FROM THE LABOR MINISTRY HAVE SO FAR BEEN ADVANCED BY RESPONSIBLE GOL OFFICIALS. IJOMA FLEMISTER STATED JULY 23 THAT PEAL WAS FIRED BECAUSE OF CORRUPT PRACTICES WITHIN THE MINISTRY, PRACTICES WHICH HAVE RECEIVED EXTENSIVE COVERAGE IN THE PRESS. T. SIAFA SHERMAN, DEPUTY MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS, TOLD THE AMBASSADOR JULY 23 THAT ONE FACTOR IN THE PEAL CASE WAS RIVALRY WITH LAVINIA ASH THOMPSON, WHOSE RISE FROM ASSISTANT MINISTER TO DEPUTY MINISTER OF LABOR SEEMED TO BE A CHALLENGE WHICH PEAL COULD NOT HANDLE. SOME LIBERIANS FEEL THAT THE RECENT FAILURE OF THE LIBERIAN SOCCER TEAM TO DEFEAT THE GUINEAN TEAM WAS CAUSE ENOUGH FOR PEAL'S DIS-

MISSAL. IN ANY CASE, PEAL IS A PARTY STALWART (A RANKING MEMBER OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE TRUE WHIG PARTY AND A TOLBERT LOYALIST) AND-IN LIBERIAN TRADITION-SOME ROLE HAD TO BE PRESERVED FOR HIM. POSTAL AFFAIRS HAS BEEN A FAVORITE SPOT FOR PARTY HEAVYWEIGHTS AND, AS T. SIAFA SHERMAN POINTED OUT TO THE AMBASSADOR, THE INCUMBENT, MS. ABEODU JONES, WAS NO LONGER ON SPEAKING TERMS WITH HER PRINCIPAL DEPUTY AND NEEDED A CHANGE OF SCENE. AS MINISTER OF HEALTH, MS. JONES WILL BE ABLE TO USE HER LONG EXPERIENCE IN THE GOL BUREAUCRACY TO ATTEMPT TO IMPROVE MINISTRY SUPPORT OF COUNTRY-WIDE VILLAGE HEALTH PROGRAMS.

E. ESTRADA BERNARD WAS MOVED OUT OF THE HEALTH MINISTRY, AGAIN ACCORDING TO T. SIAFA SHERMAN, BECAUSE BERNARD'S WIFE, AS ASSISTANT MINISTER IN THE MINISTRY, HAD TAKEN ON CONSIDERABLE CONFIDENTIAL

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ADDITIONAL DUTIES BEYOND HER SPECIFIC ASSIGNMENT WHEN HER HUSBAND HAD BEEN NAMED MINISTER THIS SITUATION WAS EXACERBATED BY MRS. BERNARD'S ARROGANCE, ACCORDING TO SHERMAN. BERNARD IS AN IMPROVEMENT OVER PEAL AT THE MINISTRY OF LABOR, IF ONLY BECAUSE HE IS QUICKER WITTED. BERNARD HAS BEEN ASSISTANT MINISTER OF JUSTICE AND LEGAL COUNSEL TO BOTH THE (FORMER) DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY AND DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS. ALTHOUGH HE HAS NO REPUTATION FOR LEGAL BRILLIANCE, HE SEEMS BETTER EQUIPPED THAN WAS PEAL TO COMPREHEND THE LEGAL PROBLEMS INVOLVED IN LABOR AFFAIRS WITHIN LIBERIA AND AT THE INTERNATIONAL LABOR ORGANIZATION. BERNARD IS MARRIED TO A SISTER OF ELLEN SIRLEAF, DEPUTY MINISTER OF FINANCE FOR FISCAL AFFAIRS, AND A LAW GRADUATE OF AMERICAN UNIVERSITY. CARTER

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